

Introduction

ONE OF MY most significant encounters with angels occurred in Jerusalem on December 31, 1990. The winters are chilly in Jerusalem, and many homes do not have central heating. My wife, Shoshana, and I lived in a two-story apartment with a large storage heater filled with bricks in the downstairs living room. Most of the heat naturally flowed up the stairwell, but the heater was far too heavy to move to a different location. After a number of chilly winters in our living room, I realized that a ceiling fan needed to be installed at the top of the stairs.

The upstairs ceiling was quite high, and I needed to balance with one foot on the railing of the stairs, leaning away from the ladder as I installed a toggle bolt for the fan. I wanted to be certain that the bolt would hold the heavy fan, so I tested it by hanging from it with my full weight, not considering

what might happen if, in fact, the bolt did not hold me. Even to this day I remember a clear warning somewhere in the depths of my consciousness. I heard it, and ignored it. (We will see in the upcoming story of Balaam how easy it is to be blind to obvious signals.)

The primary building materials in the Old City are stone, marble, iron, and plaster. As the bolt broke loose from the plastered ceiling, I felt myself toppling over, about to fall headfirst to the bottom of the marble stairs. My instinct was to reach back for the rail or ladder as the weight of my body was falling in the opposite direction. In that instant, a voice distinctly cried out: “You must jump for the middle of the stairwell!”

It was counterintuitive to jump, but within a split second I realized that it was now or never; I only had a toehold left. So I jumped. I was able to land halfway down the stairs on one foot instead of falling out of control the full distance, which almost certainly would have resulted in a major injury. Instead, only my heel was crushed—broken into a few dozen pieces.

The moment I hit the uncarpeted marble floor, I knew something was wrong with my foot. But at that same instant I had the most enormous wave of relief wash over me. I was alive and not crippled! Except for the foot, I felt fine. It could have been far more serious. I found myself feeling the deepest sense of gratitude, almost euphoria, for the rest of that evening—despite the trip to the hospital, the pain, and the slow response of the physicians.

In that state of mind, throughout the evening I felt and knew clearly the surrounding and protective forces that people call angels. This was the first time I truly experienced an extraordinary, palpable sense of Presence, and I have returned to that experience many times over the years. It was not a visual experience of beings with wings, but rather a profound *knowing* that transcends the intellect.

Mystics over the ages have attempted to describe this feeling, but it defies words. Let me simply say that most of us have experienced the excitement and joy of anticipation when we are about to meet a beloved person, and most of us have experienced the deep pleasure at certain times when our beloved is sitting next to us. These experiences are similarly impossible to convey fully with words. The palpable sense of Presence is like the profound joy and pleasure of being held in the arms of a beloved; it elicits a peace of mind that transcends description.

My studies in Jerusalem often brought me in touch with realities beyond the ordinary mundane world. It is as if I put on glasses tinted with a certain hue, and everything is seen in that new way. With special glasses in place in the spiritual realm, the world fills up with angels of all types, shapes, sizes, and energies. They are part of daily prayers, they show up in many of the biblical texts, they fill the commentaries on the texts, and they can be seen in virtually every act that is performed.

When my mother died, a few years before the stairwell incident, my older brother called to tell me the news. On the flight to California from Israel, I gazed out of the window and experienced not simply clouds and sky, but myriads of angels and my mother's spirit dancing everywhere I looked. She danced happily, finally released. This was an amazing experience. I am certain that had I not been studying biblical commentaries for years, it would have been unlikely to have had that experience on the way to my mother's funeral. Yet seeing Mom dancing with angels opened my heart. While I grieved the loss, I was happy for her; she was now free. This is one important way that learning to invoke angels can be of enormous value when difficult or tragic situations arise.

Living with angels on a daily basis cultivates an entirely new view. I do not experience angels in Hollywood images as beatific forms with wings. Rather, everything takes on a special quality; everything feels connected in a fascinating way. Whatever sense calls to me—sight, sound, touch, taste or smell—each sensation has a new feel to it. The puff of a breeze, the dance of a shadow, all shapes, movements, energies—each has a special quality. Moreover, when angels are invoked, there is a fascinating experience of never feeling alone. There is a sense of being in the midst of a constantly unfolding creation that is rich, awesome, brilliant, and complete; each and every moment is stunning.

A couple of months after breaking my heel, I got a call from my niece that my older brother had a nearly fatal heart attack. My niece is a physician, and she told me on the phone that he had about a one-in-ten chance of surviving. I caught the next plane out for New York and got to Syracuse as quickly as I could. On the way, I found myself doing a traditional archangel meditation, surrounding myself with the archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. My oldest brother's name is Ralph, and Raphael, as will be seen, is the archangel of healing.

I arrived at his bedside in the cardiac unit and saw all the tubes running in and out of his body. He could not speak because the machines were helping him breathe, but his recognition and his smile as I entered the room were priceless. When I got there, he demanded that the tube in his throat be removed, even though the risk was high. As they pulled the tube, I was in communion with the angel Raphael.

My brother survived and continues to do well fifteen years later. I do not talk to Ralph about the angel Raphael, for my brother does not want to hear about such things. His world, like that of so many, is not inhabited by angels;

even the word makes him cringe. So what? My invoking Raphael was as much for me as it was for Ralph.

I do not claim that my connection with this archangel was the cause for my brother's survival, yet I felt that both of us were "helped." I gained strength and conviction, and nobody knows to what extent this kind of conscious support and prayer for healing is useful. Still, faced with the choice between feeling entirely helpless, or using the tools of angelic imagery and prayer, I am drawn to calling upon a mysterious force of healing in which I find relief and comfort.

I have found that the archangel prayer is one of the most powerful ways to cultivate a kind of intimacy with the angelic realm. Its extraordinary power has been revealed to me time and again as I assist people in my role as a rabbi in situations of great stress, especially in times of illness or serious accidents or when I work with someone who is dying.

In the mid-nineties I was contacted by a dear friend whose son had just been seriously injured in a freak accident. He had a head injury that was causing swelling of the brain and spinal cord, and the outlook was not good. When we spoke, the surgeons had induced a coma to relieve the pressure in the hope that the swelling could be controlled. By phone, I taught my friend the archangel prayer and meditation as well as a melody that is often associated with it, and suggested that she do it out loud with her son as often as possible. Though my friend is Christian, the Archangel Meditation is universal, and people from all traditions can work with it comfortably.

She began immediately, talking and singing this guided meditation and prayer, despite the fact that her son was in a coma. She did this for days, virtually nonstop, except to sleep occasionally. When he finally came out of the coma, her son knew the words and melody of the prayer by heart; moreover,

he reported visualizations of light-filled beings that he had experienced while unconscious. To this day, my friend is certain that archangels were invoked, and they saved her son.

In a story like this most of us focus on the healing power of the angels. I would like to draw attention to the fact that this mother put her heart and soul into the experience of invoking angels, which is a process that must not be ignored; it was clearly for her a vital part of the healing that took place. Moreover, the prayers offered her a refuge in which she could participate and find some solace during those anxious days while the boy was in a coma. Healing can occur on many levels in the practice of invoking angels.

In this book we are going to explore the world of angels, and we are going to learn a number of guided meditations. These meditations are designed to help you incorporate the practices of visualization and imagination in a way that becomes comfortable and familiar. Through repetition we in essence “befriend” certain qualities that are associated with different angels. In a short time we are able to invoke feelings that connect us with the desired characteristics.

While you will greatly strengthen your experience of the book by listening and following the guided instruction for meditation, it should be noted that the accompanying audio program is designed in a way that someone who may be unable to read the book for whatever reason can still benefit by simply listening to and following the audio guided meditations.

The first track of the CD contains the short form of the Archangel Meditation. Listen to this first track repeatedly until it is memorized. It is easy to learn. Learning it by heart will give you easy access to the spontaneous invocation of these archangels in various situations.

This very practice of the Archangel Meditation is done in observant Jewish households by children and adults alike, every evening before going to sleep. It becomes so ingrained as an evening practice that it automatically arises in difficult and challenging times.

Later in the book I will describe the specific characteristics of a number of angels, including all of those named in this meditation practice. Accordingly, the CD has a track with an extended version of the Archangel Meditation, which adds richness and power to the experience. For now, however, it is more useful to memorize the fundamental practice, as it is short and easy to learn.

At various times throughout the course of this book I will suggest that you stop reading for a while and work with some of the chants and practices that are offered on the accompanying CD. Please listen to the recorded tracks one at a time, and spend time with each, for the process of invoking angels is a technique that requires immersion and repetition.

Enjoy yourself. The angelic realm is a wondrous world of infinite possibilities. So let us now begin to explore the world of angels as we know them in the Western tradition. Relax and let yourself go into the process. ❖

LISTEN TO TRACK 1
Archangel Meditation
(short form)





PART ONE

A Mystical Understanding of Angels

ANGELS AND HUMANS

In a famous biblical episode, Jacob wrestles a “man” who, when he realizes that he cannot defeat Jacob, touches Jacob’s thigh and throws it out of joint (Gen. 32:26). All oral commentaries agree that Jacob’s opponent was not an ordinary man, but an angel. There are thousands of biblical commentaries, including the Talmud, the oral tradition (Midrash), the mystical tradition (Zohar and Kabbalah), and the Hasidic tradition, as well as those in Christianity and Islam, that describe and discuss angels. In our modern times, one can Google the words “angel” and “angels” and get a combined number

of over one hundred million hits, suggesting that angels are a subject of considerable interest to many people in the world.

It is fascinating to note, for example, that when the Dalai Lama met Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, as described in the book *The Jew in the Lotus*, the Buddhist leader was enthralled by the Jewish perspective on angels. A detailed discussion between Reb Zalman and the Dalai Lama on the angels of different traditions ensued. Many of the deities in the Tibetan world have almost exactly the same characteristics as certain archangels in the Western world. Moreover, these characteristics are cultivated by using similar contemplative methods of visualization for protection, healing, blessing, strength, support, wisdom, compassion, and lovingkindness.

The angelic realm is vast; it is a new way of looking at things. We learn in the Jewish oral tradition, for example, that God consulted angels before creating humans. In these teachings, angels were not too excited about creating a human species, for they could see that it was destined to cause great trouble in the universe. It is also taught that angels were generally “jealous” of humans because we were destined to have greater latitude in our expression of free will. Angels have only limited free will, as they are more intimately connected with the Divine; humans have extensive free will, and we are more easily confused about the purpose of our own existence. These teachings provide a mythos for encountering the world in a different way.

We find that God also “consults” with humans. For example, Abraham argues with God about the decision to destroy Sodom, and he negotiates with God to try to save the city. Of course, we learn later that the city is destroyed. The issue is not what God “knew” in advance, rather it is the revelation of an interaction, a debate, and a give and take between Abraham and God (Gen. 18:24–32).